



ועידת התביעות
Claims Conference
Conference on Jewish Material Claims
Against Germany

Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

Access to the print and/or digital copies of memoirs in this collection is made possible by USHMM on behalf of, and with the support of, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum respects the copyright and other intellectual property rights associated with the materials in its collection and makes good faith efforts to determine the copyright status of such materials. The Museum has a good faith belief that the materials in this collection may be made publicly available. The Museum welcomes additional information about copyright status. If you have additional information or concerns about the copyright ownership of materials in this collection, please contact the Museum's Library by phone at 202-479-9717 or by email at reference@ushmm.org.

Erica Gorin

By: Hiale Swartz and Mark Bedwinek

Erica Gorin was born in Berlin, Germany in 1923. Her family was wealthy and lived a very comfortable lifestyle. While her father traveled through Germany for his wholesale business of selling stockings and underwear, Erica spent time with her mother, brother, and relatives that lived in the city. She would go to the zoo, the park, and Shul every Friday.

While there was always some level of anti-Semitism in Berlin, it really became apparent when she turned 10 and entered high-school (high-school in Germany begins in 5th grade). Erica was one of 3 Jewish students in her class and because of her religion she was held to a different, much higher standard. She had to have impeccable behavior, get all good grades, and do nothing to draw too much attention to her.

Erica has some really horrific memories of this time period and the escalating difficulty to live as a Jew in Berlin. On one of her first days of school, Erica met a girl named Lore, and while they got along well, their mothers discussed the fact that the girls could not be friends because Erica was Jewish. One day, Erica was walking home with her three-year-old brother and she ran into a non-Jewish classmate from her school. Her brother accidentally pushed her classmate and the girl reported the incident to her teacher. The teacher was furious that a Jewish boy would push a German girl and threatened to have Erica's father sent away. Erica's mother got down on her knees and had to beg the teacher not to report the incident. Luckily, the teacher did not.

Gradually, more and more rules were placed on the Jews in Berlin to make sure they did not have the same privileges and lifestyle as other Germans. Jews were no longer allowed to go to restaurants, stores, and theaters. Erica recalls a rule that made it so that Jews could not have maids cleaning their homes who were under the age of 40, in fear that the Jewish men would sleep with them. Erica had to sit on undesirable benches in the park that were meant only for Jews. One day she was sitting on one of these benches and young boys threw stones at her. There was nothing that she could do. Interesting to note, was the brief period of the Berlin Olympics in 1936 when things got relatively better for the Jews before getting worse again. Erica says this was because the Germans wanted to make a good impression on the foreign community.

One of the most horrible experiences days of Erica's life was November 10, 1938. Erica was 12 years old and staying with her grandmother as her parents were out of town. When she woke up, she learned that her beloved synagogue was burning. She ran to the Prinzregenten Strasses Synagogue to watch it burn down. People were standing in the street pointing and cheering, while the firemen did nothing to extinguish the fire.

In November 1938, Jewish men were starting to be taken to concentration camps. Erica's rabbi was taken to a concentration camp, and he was lucky because at this point men were still returning from the camps. Erica remembers when he returned he was extremely skinny and weak.

In order to deal with the isolation Erica felt in Germany she turned to her faith and participation in a Jewish youth group called Der Bund Deutsch- Juedischer Jugend. They talked about political issues and formed a community where their beliefs and ideals were similar. As in Torah, the story of exodus from Egypt started to have a very special meaning to Erica. It was not long after November 1938 that she would have her own.

In January 1939, Erica and her brother were very lucky as they were two of the 10,000 children that were allowed entrance into London. They said goodbye to their parents with plans to meet them later on in London, once their father was healthy enough to travel. She boarded a train with many other children. It was an extremely depressing ride and many of the children would never see their parents again.

While Erica and John were very lucky to not only safely arrive in London, they also had family there, so had places to go. Erica went to one uncle and John another. While they were safe and Erica was extremely thankful for that, the 9 months she spent in London, were some of the most difficult of her life. She was very lonely and did not feel welcome by her aunt and uncle.

In September 1939, it was decided that once again she would continue her journey, with her brother John to the United States. She first had to say goodbye to her father- who would die of poor health in London.

Once in the United States, Erica met her sponsors -her aunt and uncle. They treated her well, but in order to help out she ended up taking on a household job as a nanny and living with another family. While she worked very hard and had little free time to herself, she started to make her own life for herself. Soon after, her mother arrived in New York. Once her mother arrived, she had the opportunity to get her degree in comparative literature.

At the end of 1942, Erica met her husband Sigfried Stiefel who she married on Valentines Day 1943. They were married for over 25 years before he passed away from cancer. A few years after, she married Samuel Gorin who she lived a happy life with until 1996 when he passed away.

Although there were hardships and horrible memories from her time in Berlin and being forced to leave, Erica recognizes she has also been very fortunate. There was much love and friendship in her life, and she looks back on the happy times with so much appreciation and fondness.